

THE SVETLANA PAPERS

by Garry Wills and Ovid Demaris

STATINTL

Well, suppose Lynda Bird decided to flee to the Kremlin: do you think they'd handle it very differently over there?

There were two passages, and the book's was the more secret. It had been composed three years before her own journey, and sent on ahead. Like many books by troubled dissidents in Russia, it was smuggled out. But unlike other manuscripts, it was not published after its own passage. It waited.

She finished the book in the Summer of 1963. That autumn, she met a descendant of one of India's proudest historic families (one of its prickliest, American diplomats have discovered). This was Brijesh Singh, diminutive swashbuckler who had dabbled in revolution and espionage and *amour* all over the globe. Plagued by asthma and a heart condition, he went to Moscow to try the medical skills of the Soviet Union, and there, in the hospital, he met a middle-aged but still glowing woman who was recovering from the removal of her tonsils. Brijesh, the world revolutionary, disclosed to her his respect for Joseph Stalin even before she identified herself as the great man's daughter.

Singh was two ways useful. With his connections, he could get her book out—it was soon on its way to New Delhi, obscurely, in the diplomatic pouch of Indian Ambassador D.K. Kaul. He might also, as a trusted Marxian activist, be able to travel in the book's wake, taking its author with him—the two applied, unsuccessfully, for a marriage certificate (Singh had never divorced his first Indian wife). They also applied, unsuccessfully, for visas to India—where the book was.

Not only was Brijesh useful; he was a man of breeding, of horizons. He possessed the heady charm of the gay blade gone radical, the fascination of old cultures absorbed, old governments overthrown. He mingled charm and danger, and was part, now, of her spiritual experience; a sequel, as it were, to the book. She watched his health wane, tended his deathbed, cherished his ashes—and asked, again, for a visa to India. She had a pious wish to distribute the remains of Brijesh on the waters of the Ganges. Singh had not been a religious man, but traditions die hard in a proud line. Perhaps it was his wish. And in any event he *did* make it possible for

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